

Review Article

An Introduction to the Social History of Maximalism in Art Discourse

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Abstract

Introduction: Maximalism, an apparent new style of attitude has deep roots in the social history of art, which is the opposite of minimalism. In other words, it is a critical approach and movement against minimalism and conceptual art. The social contexts of art throughout history have a significant role in the emergence and evolution of this style. These concepts can be rooted in the transition eras from the dark Middle Ages to the golden years of the Renaissance on the one hand, and the other hand, at a smaller scale, in the counterpart historical times within the 19th and 20th centuries, with common characteristics of transition from tough social, political and economic conditions. These historical times, with relatively similar situations, have constituted the historical path of the emergence and evolution of Minimalism, which has about 40 years of history under this title. This research problem seeks to understand which cultural and social contexts have influenced the evolution of this style within the late 20th and the 21st centuries as the research question. The current study aims to explain maximalist styles during their evolution, relying on the relevant local and demographic characteristics, by providing the following items: 1. an overview of the social history of maximalism and its definitions, 2. understanding the process of its formation and evolution in the social history of art, 3. defining its place in today's global art discourse, and finally by analyzing the content of maximalism, as a style that has influenced by variant social, cultural and political contexts in the process of creation, especially in the 20th century.

Research Method: In this study, by applying a specific social history approach and a descriptive-analytical method, relying on reliable written documents, has been tried to address the social and historical contexts of maximalism in various artistic fields, following an introduction for maximalism.

Findings: by a glance at the social history of human life, one can find that having a simple and minimal lifestyle under unwanted and imposed conditions in which the individual desires and personal expression are ignored will finally actuate to completely different conditions of maximal life. Therefore, the most important factor here is the dominant social and economic conditions, especially in the current century, which have caused the development and evolution of the maximalism style.

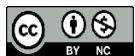
Conclusion: The social history of maximalism and the development and evolution process to emerge in its current manifestation signifies that maximalism is the outcome of passing through difficult cultural, social, and economic conditions, and similarly the severe life situations resulting from these conditions, as a reaction to the imposed minimal life within the 20th century.

Keywords

Maximalism Social history, Maximalism, Minimalism, Social History of Art, Art discourse, maximalistic art styles

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Introduction and Problem Definition

Classical art has been created glorious and ever-lasting artworks since thousands of years ago relying on its rules and regulations; many artists throughout history, have persuaded the path of the great earlier artists to preserve and fulfill the legacy of their predecessors; The presence of any personal views and creative works which was trying to put under question the classical art and its rules was rejected with a lot of objections from artistic communities. However, at the end of the High Renaissance¹ and in the intervening years of the late 16th century to the late 18th century, together with the social and political evolutions in European societies, which weakened the power of the church, courtiers, feudalism² providing the conditions for the rise of the merchant class, and the emergence of the middle class and the bourgeoisie³, art was then affected by these evolutions, as the class of artists gained power and new art styles emerged with the characteristics of de-subjectification, and relativism, as the personal expression of the artists and the usual people prevailed to the solid rules of classical art. The art styles such as Mannerism⁴, Baroque and Rococo by presenting the characteristics of movement and dynamism, bright colors, full of details, and valuing the class of ordinary people with scenes of their daily lives came to the artworks according to the self priorities. These art styles became the basis for the emergence of new creations and frequent artistic styles, later in the future, they influenced the next developments of the world, such as industrialization, modernism, World Wars I & II, economic austerity, political disturbances, and globalization, as all of these events pushed human being to a manifestation of individuality and personal expression, extremism and escape from the imposed minimalisms. One of the common styles known in art today is Maximalism which emerged under the influence of Japonism⁵, Art Nouveau, Art Deco Neo-Expressionism, and other following styles; this study, has tried to address the main features of maximalism, the manifest⁶ and its place in the history of art and social history, and also its current place in art discourse within different artistic movements. It is a style formed on the manifest of «more is more» contrasted with the «less is more» in minimalism, which has main characteristics similar to the styles mentioned above. In recent years, due to the social and economic developments and fluctuations, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by inevitable consequences, imposing an unwilling minimal lifestyle on people, the desire to escape from this obligatory way of life and a tendency towards maximum lifestyle gradually increased to expose personal expression and share the details of life interests.

Research Method

In this research, relying on published works and using the descriptive-analytical method, has been tried to discuss the social history of maximalism in art and explain the relevant context from the viewpoint of social history. Next, the relationship between art position and the emergence of maximalism has been introduced by considering its different approaches. Analyzing the social and cultural contexts influencing the emergence of an art style can be a small step in studying the social history of maximalism in the art field.

Research Background

There are few studies on social history and definition of maximalism in the Persian language as follows; the master thesis of «Azadipour» in cinematography at Shahed University (2023) entitled: «Aesthetic analysis of the influence of visual minimalism and maximalism in cinematographic works». the purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of visual minimalism and maximalism in cinematic works from aesthetics aspect and comparing the visual presentation of these two in case of composition and components. In another study, «The Influence of Maximalism and Rococo Styles on Clothing Design» by «Moeini Kordlo and Mahmoudi Alami» (2020), the two artistic styles of Maximalism and Rococo in clothing design were addressed, to find the relevant differences and similarities, and to review the aesthetic aspects of clothing by considering these two art styles. In a study by «Golzar» (2019) on the subject of «Reviewing the combination of minimalist and maximalist forms in fictional cinematography. Master Dissertation in performing arts-cinema' the author has indicated that in present cinematic works, the usual productions use a combination of minimalist and maximalist forms despite the opposite characteristics of them. In the above mentioned studies, maximalism is generally proposed and presented as a case within the analysis process of the research, though, in the current study, a brief description of the social history of maximalism in art discourse is presented, together with the historical origin and evolutionary process of it. Furthermore, the manifestations of this style in different fields of art including music, literature, and visual arts have been addressed.

Maximalism in the History of Art

Maximalism or extremism is the opposite of minimalism, which is a critical philosophy and movement parallel to it. The manifest of Maximalism briefly can imply «more is more», as opposed to the concept of minimalism, «less is more». Historically, maximalism has been applied to describe extremism of any cultural production or, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, «extremism in any field». Considering the visual arts, it was initially defined as any added decorative item. Formally, maximalism is against the characteristics of minimalism, but before presenting a conventional definition, it can be implied as a manifestation of postmodernist⁷ aesthetics, which is strongly inspired by the heritage of Baroque and Rococo (Pioaru, 2021). During the last decade, maximalism as an expression has frequently been presented in architectural publications, with unclear and presumptive significance, which has never been fully clarified and proposed in architectural discourses as anything more than a Mania Manifesto. Many authors and scholars with superficial knowledge have used this word as an attractive label, to induce the impression that maximalism expresses nothing but a superficial visual complex, which is considered as misusing that is extensively expanding. This term has been used extensively by architects and researchers, and even bloggers and journalists to describe kind of complex appearance and eclectic styles (Templeton, 2013). Maximalism by having a theoretical construct, apart from the formal glory of the contemporary multifaceted architecture, is contrast to the idea of minimalism. This style exhibits an extreme complexity that obscures all signification, as it eliminates even the basic distinctions between what exists and what is illusory. Just as minimalism reduced content to a fundamental form and sought to get limpid purity,

maximalism combines complex contents in a single work and creates conditions in which meaning goes through extreme complexity. Maximalism destroys the transparency of form by creating a thundersome sense of feeling in content. Although minimalism and maximalism have different expressions, they both create significant experiences that challenge perception by abducting the clear concept behind a subject. This adversarial relationship with the subject highlights the environs similarities and differences of the two ideas. Minimalism, as the outcome of reduction to silence, creates a perfect sense of emptiness where the subject is completely separated from the object. However, maximalism is a kind of totalizing commotion, a torrent that arouses apprehension but denies the concept (Templeton, 2013). In the field of literature and music, intellectuals have made many efforts to define maximalism. However, their work has been useful in providing a definition for maximalism or extremism in architecture. Maximalism expression alone brings up a great deal of complexity, while complexity in return does not describe this expression, as various forms of complexity may be found in any artwork or architecture, even in conditions which is visually reductive similar to minimalism. Therefore, it is better to address the complexity of maximalism as a high degree of visual incoherence of its contents, as no part of it can be isolated as a discrete object. Maximalism represents an extreme level of complexity that is ambiguous and irreducible. According to David Aaron Jaffe⁸, a prominent musician, maximalism refers to an aesthetic aspect that «Embraces heterogeneity and allows for complex systems of juxtaposition and collision» (Delville & Norris, 2005). This is because these two characteristics require the creation and configuration of several parts. Moreover, while approaching the radical complexity of a concept at an extreme level to be considered as a maximal item, this configuration of multiple contents is a totality required to prevent any integrity resembling a recognizable and so resist becoming a single unity (Templeton, 2013).

Social History of Maximalism

The initial inspirations of maximalism date back to the late decline of the High Renaissance and the early years of Mannerism, Baroque, and Rococo art styles from the 16th century to the end of the 18th century. The artists of these times were ignoring the rules of the classical art of the Renaissance as the emerging styles were a kind of reaction to the extreme splendor of the palaces of the courtiers and to the rationalistic art of the Renaissance era, which was founded on and restricted to rigid order, symmetry, and proportions. The common features include the following characteristics: freestyles and deconstruction of design rules, a various combination of shapes and figures, using bright colors like pink and green, considering a lot of glitters, and focus on details, overstatement and exaggeration, and a sense of dynamism and vitality. «In a «classical» closed composition, the intrinsic interconnected and interdependent concepts are presented. In this consistent totality, there is nothing superfluous or incomplete, while the irregular combinations of Baroque art always convey an incomplete and unrelated message to the viewer implying that the artist is pointing to something far despite the common features which has the possibility to be continued.

In these combinations, any constant and established item is unstable» (Hauser, 1951, 532); they are features that are still recognized as characteristics of the maximalism style. Among the three mentioned styles, maximalism is more influenced by the art style of Rococo. It represents feminine features including wavy and soft curves, complex forms, and gentle colors, and focuses more on emotional-sensual concepts, which is considered the origin of maximalism with more possibility than any other style. «Rococo as a style was a reaction to the rigid and formal art style of the court of Louis XIV, hence, it was manifesting a soft form of colors and delicate curved lines while dealing with the painting of material and frivolous subjects. This type of painting, full of pleased and seductive effects, was completely in line with the priorities of the aristocracy of that day» (Pakbaz, 2015, 256). According to the dominant thinking of this time, the architecture and belongings around a person were required to promote a certain lifestyle and manifestation of the values and beliefs. The inclination toward grandiose, ceremonial, and magnificent works in the early Rococo gradually disappeared, to provide a condition for a more delicate and intimate quality. Priority according to the emerging art style was more focused on colors and shadows than qualities of stability, objectiveness, and magnificence, in which there is a melody of sensuality and emotional passion. The creations of this time, even when they are addressing the highest classes of society, ignore the principled form of heroism» (Hauser, 1951, 627), similar to what is presented in today's works of maximalist arts. Seeking maximalism in the social history of art is traceable in the Japonism art style, which is a kind of admiration, acceptance, and adaptation of Japanese culture that surpassed all of Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This issue was a direct result of a demand from Commodore Perry⁹, an American imperialist who asked Japan to open its doors to the Western world in 1853. The commercial activities resulting from this happening introduced new products to public consumption and brought the Japanese style in literature, drama, music, and visual arts into French society (Leavens, 2009). Western art was prone to be influenced by a new style for various reasons at that time. «Since the Western art style was faced with the crisis of representation, the benefaction of the governed system, the expansion of the dealer and the critic system used to exploit pen names for getting money, showing off, or compensating personal issues, it needed something novel for the art market and its existing crisis. Japan's artistic vision was kind of unprecedented product for Europeans and a possible solution to their cultural-artistic crisis» (Kim, 2012). The distinctive features of Japanese art that influenced European artworks are the combination use of spaces, presenting flattened spaces, abstract approaches to color, emphasis on diagonal lines, and applying the characteristics of asymmetry, background space, high vibrancy, and dynamism. These features of Japonism and the inspired works had a lot of similarities with maximalist works. The artists like «Edgar Degas»¹⁰, «Vincent van Gogh»¹¹, «Oscar-Claude Monet»¹², «Gustave Klimt»¹³, and «James Tissot»¹⁴ are among the artists who were most influenced by the Japonism style. Art Nouveau, the popular art movement that emerged between years 1890 and 1910 during the «Belle Époque»¹⁵, had characteristics that can be considered in the social history of maximalism. This movement was a reaction to academic art, eclecticism, historical-based architecture, and decoration art

of the 19th century, which was mostly expressed in fields of interior design, graphic arts, furniture, glass art, textiles, ceramics, jewelry, and metal works. The emerging art movement was the result of a transformation in the social structure, aesthetic approaches, effectiveness of non-European arts, and a suitable reaction to the relevant time. This art is known as a turning point towards modernism as a conjunction between old styles and modern art of the 20th century, which was a kind of artistic innovation. The distinctive features of this novel art are as follows: getting inspired by plant forms (i.e., flower designs of ivy and trumpets), using wavy and curved lines, a high consideration of aesthetic aspects, strong emphasis on decorative elements, rhythmic and twisting movements joined by slimy motifs, smoothness and tenderness quality, use of bright colors, and narrative effects, imitation of art styles like old Gothic, Rococo, and Japanese art, inspired by Persian pottery, Victorian artworks and Roman glassworks (Art Nouveau, 2024). Speaking of interior decorations and applied arts, Art Nouveau highly benefited from Eastern art, especially the Persian art style. The influence of this kind of art was mostly in the field of decoration and handicrafts, which was perfectly manifested in the works of the great masters who followed this style. Prominent artists including «Comfort Tiffany»¹⁶, «Emile Galle»¹⁷ and «William Morris»¹⁸ greatly fascinated and inspired by the rich Persian Art. Considering the impact of Persian Art on the current art nouveau, and its similarities to maximalist artworks, maximalist characteristics can be traced in Persian arts such as carpets, tile architecture, and mirror artwork (Figs 1 & 2).



Fig 1. Tiling and architecture of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, is an outstanding example of Iranian art with characteristics of maximalist style. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SheikhLotfolah.jpg>.



Fig 2. An example of an Iranian carpet; frame or brick pattern, an excellent example of Iranian art representing maximalist features. Source <http://handmadecarpetpixel.blogspot.com>.

Art Deco, also known as Art Nouveau, is an art movement in the decorative arts and architecture field that first emerged in the 1920s, and became a major art style in Western Europe and the United States during the 1930s. It was initially coined by the English historian, «Bevis Hillier»¹⁹ who adopted this expression from the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Arts and Industrial Arts (Art Décorative) held in Paris in 1925, where this artistic style was first exhibited. Decorative art represents a kind of modernism that has become a trend. The products belonging to this art style included luxury items and mass-

produced goods, that aimed to create a brilliant and elegant work against a traditional approach resembling affluence and complexity (Art Deco, 2024). Art Deco was a direct response to the movement of Art Nouveau from aesthetic and philosophical aspects as an expanded model of the socio-cultural phenomenon of Modernism. While, the complex and tender forms of Art Nouveau were influenced by Nature, and used to praise hand-crafts works, Art Deco focused more on the simplification of machinery items with brilliant geometry. The main visual characteristics of Art Deco include the frequent use of linear and geometric shapes of triangles, zigzags, trapezoids, and trumpet patterns. Similar to Art Nouveau, the representation of flowers, animals, and people was applied so light and simplified to match the whole aesthetic aspects of Art Deco. Due to the emphasis on modern technology in this movement, the artists and designers who were attached to the rules of Art Deco used to apply modern materials such as plastic, Bakelite, and stainless steel, but if required to display wealth and luxury, they also used more exotic materials such as ivory, animal horn, and zebra skin (Art Deco Movement Overview, 2024). Art Deco was influenced by art movements like Art Nouveau, «Bauhaus»²⁰, Cubism, and Russian ballets of «Sergei Diaghilev»²¹. The decorative ideas in this style included motifs of nude figures of women, paintings of animals, plant foliage, and sun rays, which were often influenced by American Indians, ancient Egyptians, and Nature icons (Art Deco, 2024). According to the features of Art Deco, and its similarities to the mentioned art styles, it can be considered as an evolutionary stage of the maximalism. The Neo-Expressionism movement in the 1970s and 1980s was inspired by the German approach to Expressionism, which was popular in Germany and America. This style which initially emerged in the 1970s is mostly known for huge, figurative works that are painted quickly, often decorated with objects, such as broken plates or straw, which are presented on the work surface. The artists who were attached to this movement were objecting to the dispersed features of International minimalism, and conceptual art, to mingle their works with sensual items including narration, mythology, memory subjects, and psychology. This style is characterized by a sensation of raw materials and lively expression of emotions, especially by presenting large-scale painting works (Neo-Expressionism, 2024). Neo-Expressionism is considered a reaction to intellectual, conceptual, and minimalist art which was expanded in the 1970s, and deeply influenced by German Expressionism and «Abstract Expressionism»²². It was a kind of reaction from the exhausted society of minimalism and economic pressures. This movement is considered the last significant international movement in modern art. Neo-expressionist painters started to move away from the compositional standards defined by the minimalist style of design and conceptual art. Some of the specific features of Neo-Expressionism included sharp colors, expressive and powerful strokes of brush, and historical implications. The rigid stance toward the minimalist and conceptual art of the '60s and '70s and its visual characteristics similar to the maximalist works placed it involved in the historical evolutionary process of maximalist; The most popular of this style initiated when maximalism was first used in a formal discussion on art.

Art Foundation and Maximalism

Robert Pincus-Whitten was the first art thinker who applied the term maximalism in published works of «Postminimalism» (1977) and then 'Entries (Maximalism): Art at the turn of the decade (Art and art criticism series) (1983) in a formal art discussion. He used this term to address a group of artists who were following Neo-Expressionism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as «David Salle»²³ and Julian Schnabel²⁴ (Fig 3 & 4). Addressing the figurative expressions of these artists in response to the rigidities of minimalism and conceptual art, for instance, the eccentric theme of the book 'Entries', which is structured as diaries, remains a topic of discussion.



Fig 3. «Mingus in Mexico», David Salle, 1990, an example of Maximalism. Source: <https://artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-30-years-scrutiny-david-salles-paintings-confound>.



Fig 4. Julian Schnabel, «a student in Prague», 1983; Mixed media on wood to heavily address the aesthetic hegemonies of minimalism and the relevant conceptualism. Source: <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/20404>.

Unsimilar to the «maximalism of Pincus-Witten», an expanded analysis of this concept can be found in 'Maximalism and Visual Delight' a book written by «Courtney R. Davis», «Melissa Hempel», and Rebekah Wilson Monahan. A book deals with the work of «Jeanne Leighton-Lundberg»²⁵, who was the first artist to identify himself as a maximalist in the 1980s, according to the authors of the book. The book provides a good overview of maximalism, with several chapters dealing with the concept of maximalism in the context of contemporary culture. However, the discourse of the book is clearly formed by the specific content of Leighton Lundberg's work, which although he was introduced as a maximalist artist, his works were merely an example of the artworks that maximalism can be represented as a visual expression and artistic practice (Fig 5)



Fig 5. «Favorite Ladies II», Jeanne Layton-Lundberg, 1994-1992, oil on canvas, an example of Maximal paintings. Source:webkiosk.springville.org.



Fig 6. «The Disturbing Situation», Duggie Fields, 1969, acrylic on canvas, A Maximal work of Dougie Fields. Source: Artnet.com.

In the year 2000, artist «Duggie Field»²⁶ wrote a mini-article on Maximalism to define it addressing the below concepts: «Maximalism=Minimalism with a plus plus plus plus, and ‘involves the individual use of order to create chaos, and vice versa’». In the tradition of the high/low art experience of life-force through self and surroundings, both Inner and outer be it in gallery or gutter, expressed through Images, and sounds that haunt the Imagination through color/form and content, to grow both personal and societal, In the acceptance and celebration of the on-going change that Is the only constancy of life. death. whose logic Is witty, sometimes. Minimalism less is less or less, leads to stasis. It is overcome by gravity, overdue for the inevitable change. Maximalism, its bigger little brother, is the new cause of célèbre. «Include all exclusively conquer divisive ideology. Maximize to the max»(Maximalism, 2024). The visual language of Fields is characterized by the contrast of main colors and figures, to preload the «Microsoft color aesthetic» before the invention of digital painting. his visual language combines Pop Art with characteristics of Surrealism (Fig 6). However, the maximal characteristics are revealed more in his general approach to art. In his mind, art and life form a chain, indistinguishable from each other, as to him, «I see no separation between my art and my life, I live inside a painting» (Pioaru, 2021). The artist, «John Walter» in his PhD thesis (2015) uses 'maximal aesthetics' to address current representations of HIV²⁷ in art. According to his hypothesis, the representations of HIV since their emergence in the 1980s (e.g. presented by Felix Gonzalez-Torres)²⁸ have been highly in line with minimalist characteristics, so are no longer reliable, as they have not been in line with the scientific and therapeutic advances in the field of HIV, and also to the social changes and novel approaches. He suggests that maximalism is a better approach to represent issues related to HIV. However, he acknowledges the lack of maximal theories in this regard. He presents a functional definition of maximalism and addresses his research questions through an interdisciplinary exhibition that combines the principles of art, science, and architecture (Figs 7 & 8).



Fig 7. «Alien Sex Club». John Walter, Maximum Installation of HIV, Ambika p3 London. Source: Walter, 2015.

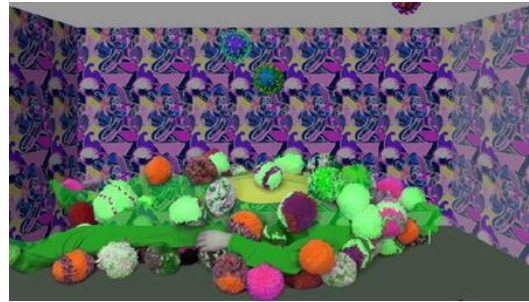


Fig 8. «Strategic Positioning», John Walter, a scene captured from a 5-minute video made with maximum features to dispel the fear of HIV, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Source: Walter, 2015.

The most ambitious definition presented for maximalism was initially provided by «Patrick Templeton» under his dissertation title: «Defining Maximalism, Understanding Minimalism» in the university (2013). Although this study targets the possibility of maximalism characteristics in architecture (Figs 9 & 10), its systematic approach to the subject and targetting the relevant philosophical concepts make it a useful source for any field with maximalist tendencies. The research by Templeton arose from the deficiency of a structured and academic definition of maximalism, which represents similar concerns addressed by authors like «Frank Zappa²⁹, Captain Beefheart and the Secret History of Maximalism», pointing to the academic absence of Maximalism and worrying about the «lack of serious attention to the development of a maximalist aesthetic». Similarly, literary critic, «Jeremy Colangelo», indicates that although the term maximalism has been used consciously for decades, there has never been a constant tradition of critical topics on maximalism, as there has been a sporadic use of it in art and literature (Pioaru, 2021).



Fig 9. «Cloud City», Thomas Saraceno, 2012, an architectural work designed in the maximal style, by using mirrors, light, and collage to achieve maximum conditions; Regarding this work, when the subject encounters the subject, the distinguish between what is literally exists as an object and what does exist as a mere image would be impossible; the project installed on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum in 2012. Source: <https://timesunion.com/preview/slideshow/cloud-city-at-the-met-42954.php>.



Fig 10. An example of the architecture and interior design of the building in the maximal style. Designed by Jacob Lucas. Source: <https://thehome.com/what-is-maximalist-interior-design>.

Maximalism in Arts within the History

Maximalism has had various manifestations throughout history in different artistic fields, including literature, music, and visual arts; in this study, their characteristics have been addressed with relevant implications.

1. Maximalism in Literature: This genre refers mostly to postmodern novels with features of excess, complexity, and 'multiplicity in quantity' and 'intensity in quality', in which deviations, implications, and explanations full of details consist of a huge volume of the text. In this regard the following works can be mentioned: the novel «Gravity's Rainbow» (Pynchon, ³⁰, 1973), «Infinite Jest» (Wallace, ³¹, 1996), «White Teeth» (Smith, ³², 2000) in international literary works, and the novel of «Kelidar»³³ by «Mahmoud Dawlatabadi» in the Iranian literary works. Similarly, the maximal approach in poetizing Ghazal (a form of poem/ sonnet) manifests the concern of maximalism in today's Iranian poetry, in which the principle and basis of the dynamism in created work are more focused on literature, rather than the poetic aspect; as according to the ambiance of the today's poetry and the self-presenting definitions, it seems they have created a lion without a mane, a tail and roar from the words realm by using maximal/minimal theories (Azarpeyk, 2019, quoted by Masih, 2022). Moreover, this genre of Ghazal has opened a new horizon of writing style and attitude toward literature (the artistic realm of the word) regardless of gender and system in the world of literature. Maximalist sonnets or Ghazal will also occur in the literature of the third gender, not necessarily in the realm of the lyrical aspect; However, if the space of the text permits, it can also happen thoroughly in the field of poetry [by considering the lyrical aspect], as according to «Yalda's eyes and the key word of the holographic world»³⁴, a deep well is much more gorgeous and higher than an ocean as deep as a knuckle (Masih, 2022). «John Barth»³⁵, the prominent novelist defines literary maximalism through the medieval Roman Catholic Church's opposition between «two roads to grace: the via negativa of the monk's cell and the hermit's cave, and the via affirmativa of immersion in human affairs, of being in the world whether or not one is of it. Critics have aptly borrowed those terms to characterize the difference between «Mr. Beckett»³⁶, for example, and his erstwhile master «James Joyce»³⁷, himself a maximalist except in his early work» (Barth, 1986, 1). «Takayoshi Ishiwari»³⁸ explains Barthes' definition by incorporating the postmodern approach in the concept of originality as follows: «Under this category are writers such as Thomas Pynchon and Barth whose books with multi-volume is in opposition to the rather low-volume and short novels of «Barthelem»³⁹. They are called maximalist authors as they are standing in the era of epistemological uncertainty in which they know that they can never discriminate the authentic and inauthentic works or reliable and not-reliable concepts. Therefore, they try to include everything that belongs to that specific time in their stories. They are trying to make a work with maximum life-span, in other words, they have tried to represent their own time, and for this reason, the novels written by them are often a kind of encyclopedia. As «Thomas LeClair»⁴⁰ argues in 'The Art of Excess' as below: the authors of these masterpieces try to override the time, narration styles, and the readers by collecting, representing, and transforming the maximalism of the time into fictions that exceed the time's literary conventions (Ishiwari, 1996).

2. Maximalism in Music: The prominent musician, «Richard Taruskin»⁴¹, initially uses maximalism to describe modernism between 1890 to 1914, especially by targeting the works that were created in German-speaking countries and defined it as «a radical

intensification of means towards accepted or traditional ends». However, this view is challenged by the fact that Taruskin used the term simply as a «free-floating signifier» includes a wide range of musical styles, grand orchestration, motivic and harmonic complexity, and other relevant factors, which he considered as an example of modernism (Harper-Scott, 2012, 22). However, Taruskin was applying this expression- which was not created by him- to the mid-1960s, referring to the Russian composers of the time, of which «Sergei Prokofiev»⁴² was the last one (Cooper, 1965, 58). «Richard Toop»⁴³ also believed that musical maximalism is to be understood at least partly as «anti-minimalism» (Toop, 1993). Contemporary maximalist music has been defined by composer David A. Jaffe as: «It embraces heterogeneity and allows for complex systems of juxtapositions and collisions in which all external influences are viewed as potential raw material» (Jaffe, 1995). Today, contemporary maximalism is defined as a mean for embracing heterogeneity and encouraging the cooperation of these heterogeneities. «Milton Babbitt»⁴⁴ is among the artists whose work is known as professional maximalist music. Among other famous people in this field with maximalist works one can point to «Edgard Varese»⁴⁵, «Charles E. Ives»⁴⁶ and «Frank V. Zappa.» The song «My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy» by «Kanye O. West»⁴⁷ is one of the musical works that is referred to as a maximalist work. Similarly, Charlemagne «Palestine»⁴⁸ has described his drone-based music as a maximalist.

3. Visual Maximalism: Maximalism in the visual arts is associated with the use of strong contrasting colors, gallant geometric patterns, mixed textures, and the use of flowers and plants. As indicated earlier, maximalism as a term in the visual arts was initially coined by art historian, Robert Pincus-Witten to introduce a group of artists, including future Oscar-nominated filmmaker, Julian Schnabel and David Sully Sullivan, coincided and related with the turbulent beginnings of Neo-Expressionism in the late 1970s. The mentioned artists were rather disappointed and tired of the reverent, reductionist regime of minimalism, which in the long run had them fail in creating artworks. However, maximalism was also detectable earlier in the mid-1960s in some of «Gary Stephan's»⁴⁹ psychoanalytic paintings. China was the first place where an exclusive exhibition was held on Maximal artworks. In the year 2003, an exhibition titled «Chinese Maximalism» was organized by «Gao Minglu»⁵⁰, an assistant professor at the University of New York/ SUNY Buffalo⁵¹ in the Department of Art History was a leading authority on Chinese art in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this exhibition, a collection of 65 artworks by 15 contemporary Chinese artists, including «Hong Hao»⁵², was displayed, which was the first presentation that seriously focused on maximalist visual works (Fig 11). «Gao» says: «Chinese maximalism emphasizes the spiritual experience of the artist in the process of creation as a self-contemplation outside and beyond the artwork itself". "The material existence of the work can perhaps be perceived as an affirmation of this spiritual experience. These artists pay more attention to the creation process, the uncertainty of meaning, and the instability in a work. "The meaning is not directly reflected in a work, because according to them the artist's mind at the moment of creation, may not necessarily appear in his/her work» (Chinese Maximalism, 2024).



Fig 11.« My Things», Hong Hao, 2003, one work out of 65 works by 15 contemporary artists featured in the Chinese Maximalism exhibition. Source: <https://dhbr.diamond.jp/articles/-/4281>.

The director of the UB Art Galleries, «Sandra H. Olsen», explains this concept by describing his trip to Beijing in March 2001 for the first exhibition at the ‘China Millennium Monument’ a Museum in Beijing. She added: «My understanding of the concept of maximalism was enhanced as I watched elderly Chinese men practicing the art of calligraphy on the city’s sidewalks, ‘They were using water. As each brush stroke was applied, the one before it disappeared. It was the process that held meaning to them as they struggled to maintain a dying cultural practice». The artworks of artists Ding Yi⁵³ and Li Huasheng⁵⁴ are the examples of this approach (Riemer, 2003). (Figs 12 & 13).



Fig 12. «In the Woods», Li Huasheng, 1993, ink and wash technique. Source: <https://wikiart.org/en/li-huasheng/in-the-woods-1993>.



Fig 13. «Appearance of Crosses», Ding Yi, 2002, abstract painting with maximal style. Source: <https://wikiart.org/en/ding-yi/appearance-of-crosses-2002-1-2002>.

On the other hand, maximalism refers to a chaotic image in which many elements are competing with each other to attract the attention of the audience. However, in this chaos there is also a kind of balance. Creating a balanced work in this way is difficult, although it can be pleasing to the viewer to explore the work. These characteristics can be observed in photos with maximal style, which typically have a combination of mixed elements and rather unrelated elements next together, with sharp and contrasting colors in an entangled texture. At first glance, a photo in maximal style may give the impression of a confusing and strange look, but these features provide a different visual quality, which invites the

viewer to explore its components and experience a strange sense of feeling, rather hard to express, but still can be realized that it has not been experienced before. Maximum style is being used in different genres of photography such as street photography, architecture photography, and landscape photography (Fig 14), which has been mostly used in fashion photography in recent years. The photographers of the most recognized fashion brands like Glen Luchford⁵⁵, Mert Alas⁵⁶ and Marcus Piggott (Mert and Marcus) who have represented the design works of people such as Alessandro Michele⁵⁷, the Italian maximalist fashion designer, who is the spiritual father of maximalist style in the world of fashion (Fig 15). Today, maximalism is extensively used in graphic design, as well as in logo designs, posters, magazine covers, and music album covers (Fig 16 & 17).



Fig 14. «Backwaters Mountain», Nadia Attura, an example of landscape photography in maximalist style. Source: <https://saatchiart.com/art/Photography-Backwaters-Mountain/690938/10245029/view>.



Fig 15. «Gucci campaign, Pre-Fall 2016», Glenn Luchford, 2016, Fashion design and photography in maximalist style. Source: https://gucci.com/ca/en/stories/article/agenda_2016_issue04_prefall_adv_campaign.



Fig 16. A work by Luca Lova presented in the 2023 workshop of Hereford College of Art with the explanation of maximum graphic design. Source: <https://www.canva.com/learn/maximalism>.



Fig 17: Some examples of logo designs of famous brands in maximalist style. Source: <https://vividcreative.studio/post/the-art-of-maximalism-in-graphic-design>.

Analyzing the Social Contexts of Maximalism

Maximalism, in its most general form, is the outcome of difficult cultural, social, and economic conditions that usually lead to extremes and extravagance, and also toward the desire to have personal expression. By looking at the social history of human life, it can be realized that tolerating a simple and minimal life due to imposed conditions or circumstances, in which the desires and personal expressions have been ignored, mostly led to a completely different condition, which is called maximal lifestyle, after passing through those imposed conditions. The individual with such experience starts to overindulge in every aspect of life to compensate for the hardships of past situations in any possible way and leave the past life behind. By reviewing the social contexts of maximalism and focusing on the reasons for the formation of this style, which dates back to the Renaissance era, passing through centuries of oppression of the church, we can finally see that following the opening of political and social spaces, where the lower classes gained strength and the Medium classes were valued, the inclinations and tendencies of individuals in the art and personal lifestyle have completely changed by turning from classical art, church and court arts to more free and popular art, which caused the emergence of the Mannerism, Baroque, and Rococo styles, as the traces of these movements and their impression on people's personal lives in addition to the artworks are detectable. The European man of that time then had the right to choose his own lifestyle in many aspects, following the emergence of such conditions, as he represented this right highly in the form of maximalism in architecture, artworks, and even in the interior design and decoration. He started to collect everything he valued and was deprived of for centuries altogether in one place in his home. 'The growth of individualism provided fundamental changes in the lifestyle of the European countries. In spite of the prevalence of a universal sense of social conditions during the Middle Ages which was arising from a common body, in emerging conditions, the opposite dominance was expanding. A distinct and prominent individual experience, like a simple touch, was a kind of 'Nescence of Individuality' for the people of that time' (Hasanpur, 2021). This social reaction and phenomenon can be observed everywhere in the social history of the past centuries, where human eventually released from difficult conditions. Speaking of the cultural and social contexts influencing the evolution of maximalist style in the late 20th century and within the 21st century, some points should be mentioned as follows: Within the last years of the 70s and the early years of the 80s, the maximalist style emerged, in which the artists tired of the limitations of conceptual and minimalist art for several decades, under the influence of economic, social and cultural outcomes of the World War II, and following the increase in oil prices and the economic instability of the seventies in Western countries, released from restrictions of the previous decades, started to create extremist works in all areas, from hairstyles and clothing to buying luxury cars and houses. The beginning of this current was seen in the works of neo-expressionist artists which spread later to other forms of art including music and literature as well. In the 21st century, and especially in the second decade, the use of maximalism in various art fields, including graphics, fashion design, and fashion photography become prevalent. Regarding the cultural and social conditions affecting the re-emergence of maximalism in the current century, the following happening can be noticed: 1. the economic recession of 2007-2014 and the resulting economic severity after, 2. The events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and the subsequent wars, and finally 3. The pandemic of Covid-19, which had adverse effects

on people`s lifestyles, as the affected individuals, similar to people in the 1970s, released from the difficult conditions of the previous decades, started to adopt an extremist lifestyle and the expansion of maximalist art style, which all were arising from the mentioned requests, tendencies, and conditions.

Conclusion

Maximalism, or extremism as a new style in the art world today with the manifest of «more is more», is opposite to minimalism and conceptual art in terms of philosophy and the necessity of content. It is considered a style with characteristics of extremism, overloading, focusing on details, dynamism, desire toward individuality, and personal expression which were reflected in the artistic styles of Baroque, Rococo, Japonism, Art Nouveau and Neo-Expressionism as the origin of maximalism; similarly, this style can be seen in many Iranian art styles such as carpet weaving, tile works and mirror works as a naturally maximal art. Although the philosophy behind the creation and existence of this kind of artwork is rather different compared to the maximalism discourse of European art, however, by reviewing the origin of the social history of maximalism and its evolution, it can be seen that maximalism is the result of human transition of difficult cultural, social, and economic conditions and its severe outcomes, which is a reaction to the minimal lifestyle imposed by those difficult times, similar to the experience of art styles. Today, rapid and disturbing social changes and the causing factors, including economic crises, wars, and happenings like the Covid-19 pandemic, deprive people of an ideal lifestyle, getting them away from their mental and physical desires and ambitions, to express wishes and individuality, maximalism emerged in various art styles such as painting, photography, graphics, fashion and architecture, and also in various aspects of human lifestyle as a social action in the context of art, more than any other time, both in Iran and in other countries that is still expanding.

Author Contributions

This study, extracted from the master's thesis of the first author under the guidance of the second author; The project provides a historical and brief look at the formation process of maximalism in all kinds of arts with a socio-analytical approach. The first author had the responsibility of collecting data and the historical implications in a specific order. Data analysis, verification of resources, presenting analytical findings, and, technical editing were the responsibility of the second author.

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Appendix

1. **Renaissance:** it refers to a short period of the most exceptional period of art history in the Italian States, especially Rome (the capital of the Papal States) and Florence during the years between 1495 and 1530 AD.
2. **Feudalism:** A land-owning system of Western Europe which was a combination of social, economic, political, and customs in the Middle Ages.
3. **Bourgeoisie:** It was considered one of the categories used in defining social classes in the Late Middle Ages, which refers to the upper class of wealthy people in capitalist society.
4. **Stylism or Mannerism,** which sometimes addresses the «Late Renaissance», is a style that became popular in European art and literature that emerged in the last years of the Italian High Renaissance around 1520, spreading around 1530 and lasting until about the end of the 16th century in Italy, when the Baroque style prevailed.
5. **Japonisme:** A French term emerged in the 19th century that refers to the popularity and influence of Japanese art and design among several Western European artists following the forced reopening of foreign trade with Japan in 1858.
6. **Manifest (o):** It is a written statement that a person or group uses to express their principles, opinions, beliefs, and goals to the public.
7. **Postmodernism:** It refers to broad changes in critical attitude, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and culture, which emerged from the heart of modernism and in response to it. Postmodernism is a historical-sociological concept that mainly addresses the historical course after modernism.
8. **David Aaron Jaffe** (1955-present) is an American composer who has written more than ninety works for orchestra, chorus, chamber ensembles, and electronics.
9. **Matthew Calbraith Perry:** (1858-1794) was a US Navy officer and commander of several ships.
10. **Hilaire Germain Edgar De Gas:** known as Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was a French painter who was also a master in drawing, sculpture, and printing.
11. **Vincent Willem van Gogh:** (1890-1853) was a Dutch post-impressionist painter whose work had a far-reaching influence on the 20th century. art.
12. **Oscar-Claude Monet:** (1840, Paris – 1926, Giverny) was a French painter and one of the founders of the French Impressionism style.
13. **Gustav Klimt:** (1862-1918) was an Austrian symbolist painter who was the most prominent member of the *Vienna Secession Movement*.
14. **James Tissot:** (1836-1902) was a French painter and portraitist.
15. **Belle Époque:** it refers to French, Belgian, and European history with characteristics of philosophical optimism, regional peace, economic prosperity, technological, scientific, and cultural innovations that were initiated around 1871-1880 and ended with the start of World War I.
16. **Louis Comfort Tiffany:** (1848-1933) was an American decorative artist and designer.
17. **Émile Gallé: (1846-1904):** was a French crystal maker and engraver who was a prominent representative of the Arnaud movement.
18. **William Morris: (1834-1896)** was an English textile designer, writer, poet, artist, and socialist activist who was known for the British Arts and Crafts movement.
19. **Bevis Hillier:** (born 28 March 1940) is an English art historian, author, and journalist.
20. **Bauhaus:** was a school of design, architecture, and applied arts in Germany that trained artists from 1919 to 1933 and played an important role in establishing a link between design and technology.
21. **Ballet Russes** was a ballet company founded in 1909 by Sergei Diaghilev in Paris that performed in Europe, South America, and the United States of America until 1929 (Diaghilev's death).
22. **Abstract Expressionism:** It is a new art style that started in New York in the 1940s, influenced by two styles of expressionism and surrealism.

23. **David Salle:** (1952-present) is an American postmodern painter, printmaker, photographer, and stage designer who was one of the artists in "The Pictures Generation.
24. **Julian Schnabel:** (1951-present) is an American painter and filmmaker.
25. **Jeanne Leighton-Lundberg:** (1925-2014) American painter who described herself as the first artist of maximalism.
26. **Douglas Arthur Peter Field:** (1945-2021) was a British artist also known as Dougie Fields.

27. **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV):** is a type of slow-growing virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
28. **Felix Gonzalez-Torres:** (1957-1996) was a Cuban-born American visual artist.
29. **Frank Zappa:** (1940-1993) was an American composer, electric guitarist, and film director.
30. **Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr. (born 1937):** is one of the most prominent American novelists.
31. **David Foster Wallace:** (1962-2008) was an American novelist and short story writer.
32. **Zadie Smith:** (born October 25, 1975, in London) is a British novelist and essayist.
33. **Kelidar:** is the longest novel ever written in Persian by Mahmoud Dolatabadi, spanning 10 volumes and 2,836 pages. It is a novel on the philosophical-literary school of originality of words (Orianism: an expression in Persian).
34. It is a novel on the philosophical-literary school of originality of words (Orianism: an expression in Persian) written by Arash Azarpeik, Hengameh Ahura, and Nilofar Masih, which was published in 2016 by Roozgar Publishing.
35. **John Barth:** (born on May 27, 1930): an American writer and novelist.
36. **Samuel Barclay Beckett:** (1989-1906) was an Irish dramatist, novelist, and poet.
37. **James Augustine Aloysius Joyce:** (1882-1941) was an Irish novelist noted for new literary methods applied in a large work of fiction known as Ulysses as the greatest novel of the 20th century.
38. **Takayoshi Ishiwari:** (born 1970) is an associate professor at Osaka University Graduate School of Literature.
39. **Donald Barthelme:** (1931- 1989) was an American postmodernist short-story writer and novelist.
40. **Thomas LeClair:** (born 1944) is a writer and literary critic who was a professor of English at the University of Cincinnati until 2009.
41. **Richard Taruskin:** (2022-1945) was an American musicologist and music critic.
42. **Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev:** (1891-1953) was a Russian composer and pianist.
43. **Richard Toop:** (1945-2017) was a British-Australian musicologist.
44. **Milton Babbitt:** (1916-2011) was an American composer, music theorist, mathematician, and university professor.
45. **Edgard Varèse:** (1883-1965) is a modern French composer who influenced on contemporary avant-garde music.
46. **Charles Edward Ives:** (1874-1954) was an American modernist composer.
47. **West:** (born 1977) is an American rapper, songwriter, record producer, and fashion designer.
48. **Chaim Moshe Tzadik Palestine:** (born 1947) is an American visual artist and musician.
49. **Gary Stephan:** (born 1942) is an American abstract painter born in Brooklyn.
50. **Gao Minglu:** (born October 29, 1949) is a scholar in Chinese contemporary art.
51. **The University of Buffalo, The New York State:** known as SUNY-Buffalo, is one of the most prestigious universities in America and one of the New York State universities located in the city of Buffalo, New York.
52. **Hong Hao:** A Chinese artist and photographer born in 1965 in Beijing.
53. **Ding Yi: (born 1962):** is a contemporary Chinese artist and an art professor at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts.
54. **Li Huasheng:** (1944-2018) was a Chinese artist from Yibin, Sichuan Province, who was one of the foremost traditional Chinese landscape painters of his generation.

55. **Glen Luchford:** (born 1968) is a British fashion photographer and film director.
56. **Mert Alaş** (born 1971) **and Marcus Piggott** (born 1971), work together on a collaborative basis.
57. **Alessandro Michele:** (born 1972) Italian fashion designer who currently works as the Creative Director of Gucci.

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